

# Tactical-Level Public Affairs and Information Operations

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*"... we must restructure our military for the new challenges of the Information Age, and not just downsize an already overtaxed contingency force."<sup>1</sup>*

— General John J. Sheehan, US Marine Corps

**T**HE PUBLICATION of US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-6, *Information Operations*, in August 1996, coupled with the current and impending changes in the information age-based military, requires that the US Army examine how to conduct warfare and contingency operations today and in the future. This article looks at incorporating information operations (IO) at the tactical level and increasing the role of Public Affairs (PA) on the contemporary multidimensional battlespace. Lessons learned from the November 1998 Division Advanced Warfighting Experiment (DAWE) as well as current operational missions in Bosnia and Kuwait provide platforms to embody IO as an integral force multiplier. In fact, numerous IO articles and concept papers are being integrated into military planning and support many of the observations recorded from recent IO experiences and the doctrinal philosophies found in FM 100-6.

## The DAWE Experience

The DAWE held last fall at Fort Hood, Texas, was an example of employing IO at the tactical level. One of the DAWE's six experimental imperatives outlined by the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) was "does the division have the ability to plan, coordinate and execute information operations?"<sup>2</sup> To implement this, the 4th Infantry Division and Experimental Force (EXFOR) established an IO cell similar to the type outlined in FM 100-6.<sup>3</sup> One major change was the overall cell director. During the DAWE "ramp-ups," the assistant division commander for support (ADC-S) replaced the chief of staff as the IO director due to

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availability, staff synchronization, higher/subordinate headquarters coordination and the priority that the EXFOR assigned to the task of maturing IO at the division. This adjustment allowed a focus of stovepipe organizations, many of which, up to that point, did not normally engage in continuous staff planning, coordination and execution of IO.

FM 46-1, *Public Affairs Operations*, states that "Public Affairs fulfills the Army's obligation to keep the American people and the Army informed, and helps to establish the conditions that lead to confidence in America's Army and its readiness to conduct operations in peacetime, conflict and war."<sup>4</sup> The PA mission will not fundamentally change in the digital division. However, with digital technologies and IO, the PA section's focus will be PA planning, media facilitation, global information environment (GIE) acquisition/analysis, information campaigns and IO coordination. Due to the austere size of PA sections at the tactical and operational levels, combined with an increasing staff-support responsibility, the "traditional" product-driven PA functions, such as newsletter production, external releases and photo journalist duties must be handled by PA augmentation units. Normally, field units are augmented by several PA detachments (PADs) or mobile PA detachments (MPADs) depending on the force's size and mission.<sup>5</sup>



*With reporters embedded in units, and with an ever-increasing ability to move around the modern battlefield, the intelligence value of media analysis cannot be overlooked. "Nonmilitary sources can provide tactical-level information in near real time to global audiences with the potential of profoundly influencing operations."*

### Operation Desert Thunder

Tensions increased in the Southwest Asia area of operations in the latter part of 1997. This escalated in early February 1998 and, as consequence, compelled the deployment of a coalition/joint task force (C/JTF) consisting of Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine forces, as well as allied countries to Kuwait. Operation *Desert Thunder*'s mission was to deter Iraqi aggression toward Kuwait, assure other Gulf allies of our interest in regional stability and, if necessary, defend Kuwait. The C/JTF formed an IO cell, born out of the Deep Operations and Information Warfare cells. This was the command's initial attempt at implementing FM 100-6 IO-based principles at the theater level. Similar to other experiences, some difficulty arose in bringing FM 100-6 IO guidelines into the diverse coalition and joint information functions. Through exercises and planning conferences during the operation, IO demonstrated that it is a prime player in modern military operations. Due to real-world missions, global attention and ongoing combat buildup, the exercises occurred within an information-rich environment,

yielding substantial gains in C/JTF level IO implementation and lessons learned.

### Integrating PA Into IO

"Information Operations are defined as continuous military operations within the MIE [military information environment] that enable, enhance and protect the friendly force's ability to collect, process and act on information to achieve an advantage across the full range of military operations; IO include interacting with the GIE and exploiting or denying an adversary's information and decision capabilities."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, FM 100-6 describes the GIE as "all individuals, organizations or systems, most of which are outside the control of the military or National Command Authorities, that collect, process and disseminate information to national and international audiences."<sup>7</sup>

A sound IO strategy includes PA, civil affairs (CA) and psychological operations (PSYOP) planning. Keep in mind that IO is not just another way of saying information warfare (IW).<sup>8</sup> IW is an important pillar in the IO triad, but IO is more than command and control warfare (C<sup>2</sup>W). C<sup>2</sup>W, CA and PA are the three operations the Army uses to gain and maintain information superiority and effective C<sup>2</sup>.<sup>9</sup> IO integrates all aspects of information to support and enhance combat power's elements, with the goal of dominating the battlespace at the right time and place with the right weapons and resources.<sup>10</sup> "PA must be integrated with IO to present accurate, balanced and credible information."<sup>11</sup>

"Current and emerging electronic technologies permit any aspect of a military operation to be made known to a global audience in near real time and without the benefit of filters. With easy access to the global or national information network, suppression, control, censorship or limitations on the spread of information may be neither feasible nor desirable."<sup>12</sup>

PA's major role in IO is to enable the command to effectively operate in an environment where near real-time media reporting and analysis of tactical and operational military actions can have expeditious effects at the strategic level. This impact, and consequent shifts in national and military strategies or policies, is known as the "CNN effect."<sup>13</sup> "TV viewers, including leaders, react emotionally and forcefully to images, and public pressure forces policy makers to respond quickly."<sup>14</sup> A significant measure of success would be sustaining national and, at times, coalition resolve and the degree to which we are able to counteract the effects of enemy misinformation or disinformation. Therefore,

“media coverage can be pivotal to the success of the operation and achieving national strategic goals.”<sup>15</sup>

Gone are the days where the military had some degree of control over media in the battlespace and normally, their content. “New communications technologies and giant media conglomerates will create a different military environment. Using a combination of cable and satellite television news services and the World Wide Web news sites, individual citizens, military families and even the “bad guys” will be able to call up the in-depth news they seek—on demand, 24 hours a day. In the next war or peacekeeping (PK) operation, the media will be more independent and better equipped, and the US military will not have the control it had over the media in the Gulf War. Future governments—the United States, NATO or UN—may find themselves fighting the war of words and images at a digital disadvantage.”<sup>16</sup>

### Perception Management

“An Army compelled to fight and win in the information age has no option but to leverage public affairs and derive its maximum contribution to combat power.”<sup>17</sup> PA, CA and PSYOP deal with information as it pertains to perceptions, attitudes and actions. To conduct a perception-management campaign PA, CA and PSYOP must continually coordinate and deconflict messages to develop a focused message and speak with one voice. “Commanders ensure that PA operations are synchronized with other combat functions and promote early coordination of PA, CA and PSYOP functions during the planning process. A continual exchange of information must exist during execution as well. Although each function has a specific audience, information will overlap, making it crucial that messages are deconflicted and coordinated.”<sup>18</sup>

Although each organization targets specific audiences and has differing mediums for information dissemination, the paramount element is truth. An IO organization that consistently tells the truth, within the bounds of operations security (OPSEC) builds a degree of credibility with its target audiences. “Credibility is essential for successful IO. If an information source is not perceived as believable, then the desired effect of that communication cannot be achieved.”<sup>19</sup> Due to the exponential increase in media technologies and battlefield access, all participants in military operations must be aware that what they say, whom they say it to and how they express it can have ramifications at all levels. “The military must recognize that new information



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technologies continue to blur the distinction between tactical, operational and strategic decisions. Thanks to SkyNews and CNN, a young officer's or NCO's decision in the field will be shown live to millions around the world.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, as demonstrated in recent PK and contingency operations, comments and actions

at the tactical level can influence strategic decisions.

"Now, not only must the commander consider height, breadth, depth and time in visualizing battlespace, he must also consider perception and all factors affecting it."<sup>21</sup> Leaders must understand how to focus this picture in today's complicated world—a world where influencing people's hearts and minds may be more important than destroying the enemy.<sup>22</sup>

### What PA Brings to IO

A key function of the PA IO battle staff is the trend and content analysis of news reports in the GIE.<sup>23</sup> To accomplish this task, the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) "must have the capability to monitor the national and international media and identify and assess information relevant to the operation."<sup>24</sup> Due to unique or specialized equipment, especially in the digital division prototype design, the PAO and PA plans section have access to a wide variety of open-source, media-generated information. For instance, the EXFOR PA van for the

DAWE contained two large-screen television monitors and connections to a Direct Satellite System (DSS)-type configuration that allowed 24-hour access to such channels as CNN, BBC and with development, major television networks. With the addition of two video recorders, the section can chronicle certain reports to play for other IO cell members for further analysis. As proved in the experiment, this will permit the PA staff to monitor how the world is viewing the military operations, track the effect of those reports, observe reporting trends and analyze how command messages are being conveyed. Another exercise lesson learned is that the embedded PA assets at the tactical—and operational level—do not have the equipment, expertise or personnel to acquire, monitor or analyze all open-source information within the GIE.

To assist in obtaining a more complete picture of how the GIE is affecting military operations, echelons at the strategic level must constantly survey the GIE and quickly push products down to the lowest necessary level. Likewise, tactical- and opera-

## Unit-Level Public Affairs Planning

Captain Scott C. Stearns

"Our worst enemy seems to be the press!" This statement, made by President Richard M. Nixon shortly after the 1971 South Vietnamese incursion into Laos, still reflects the feelings of many military professionals toward the media. The idea that the media "caused us to lose" the Vietnam War by poisoning public opinion and eroding public support is now a part of our national military lore and is accepted as the leading cause of our defeat. Of course, as military historians and political scientists can attest, the cause of our loss in Vietnam ran deeper than bad public relations, but the "antimedia" stigmatism remains. However, today's military leaders understand the role the media plays in our democratic form of government, but most wish the reporters would ask their questions elsewhere and point their cameras in another direction.

Many military leaders would like to censor the media and exclude it from future areas of operations. Unfortunately, this is not possible because the advancement in computer technology causing the "Revolution in Military Affairs," is the same technology that is affecting all media functions, including electronic news gathering. The 1991 Persian Gulf War was the first major conflict to have actual battle scenes captured "live" by major network television cameras. The next war will undoubtedly be carried "live" by global news organizations. In the Gulf War, the equipment needed for a "live feed" was expensive and cumbersome, but today, this equipment is handled by two-person crews.<sup>1</sup> The required equipment—a digital camera, a wide-band cellular tele-

phone to establish contact with a satellite dish and a laptop computer to coordinate the transmission—are all miniaturized, weigh less than 100 pounds and fit into two carrying cases.<sup>2</sup> The media already have their own satellites for sending and receiving video and may soon have imagery satellites to photograph the war below.<sup>3</sup> People like pictures and tend to accept what they see on video as positive proof.<sup>4</sup> Pictures provide a lasting memory—Marines burning huts in Vietnam, Patriot versus Scud missiles in the Gulf, dead US soldiers in the streets of Somalia, protesters at the port in Haiti, Army engineers battling the Sava River in Bosnia. Military leaders must plan for an aggressive, technology-advanced media presence on the future battlefield.

The military understands the growing influence the media plays in shaping foreign policy and the actual use of military force. Dealing with the media is now a major component of modern-day battle plans, and practically every military command, no matter how small, has a public affairs (PA) staff.<sup>5</sup> Current Army PA doctrine assigns a public affairs officer (PAO) in the rank of major or lieutenant colonel to each divisional staff. During a deployment or conflict, the PAO may assign a section of his staff to provide direct support to divisional brigades, while a PA detachment (PAD) may be assigned to provide general support to separate brigades. Unfortunately, this is the extent of Army PA manning. At the battalion level, PA is handled internally, and the success—or failure, of the unit's media relations depends on the effort devoted to PA planning and training.

tional-level PA assets must continually make their information needs known to higher information collection agencies to obtain the clearest picture possible. This examination can result in a revision of themes, refinement of PA guidance (PAG) and gauge the effectiveness of a concerted "perception" campaign.

Similar to trend and content analysis is propaganda analysis and antipropaganda courses of action (COAs). This function relies on intense coordination between PA IO planners and the CA and PSYOP sections. Additionally, subject-matter experts such as intelligence/counterintelligence staff members, staff judge advocate (SJA) representatives, Land Information Warfare Activity (LIWA) personnel and other elements may be required to "complete the picture." Because propaganda can be subtle or overt, any country can use propaganda as a quick, inexpensive way to garner global attention and support. Hence, the enemy can use its own coordinated form of IO to engage forces at every level. "Even for a poor adversary, IO offers a dis-

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proportionately high return for any investment."<sup>25</sup> Arising from a propaganda analysis and antipropaganda response coordination meeting is the overriding concern to tell the complete truth as soon as operationally possible.

The oft-used term "speaking with one voice" must be the preeminent guide, as the sections plan, coordinate and execute a focused set of messages and

Unlike other combat multipliers the battalion commander controls, he or she must achieve the PA mission without trained personnel assigned to this function. Normally, the battalion commander appoints a quality junior officer or noncommissioned officer to perform this function in addition to their normal duties. PA planning is becoming an integral element of the decision-making process and, if done in concert with operational planning, it enhances the commander's range of options.<sup>6</sup>

To be successful, the battalion PAO must have two things—access to the commander and a complete understanding of the unit mission. The success or failure of the battalion PA plan will rely on this soldier's ability to perform PA planning, conduct media facilitation and prepare the unit for media encounters. The battalion PAO should receive two items from brigade headquarters to help facilitate the battalion plan: the PA annex to the operations order (OPORD) and the approved PA guidance (PAG). The PA annex, doctrinally lettered "V," is based on the division and brigade PA assessments and estimates. The assessment focuses on such topics as media presence, media capabilities, information needs, media content analysis, public opinion and information infrastructure. Likewise, the estimate should contain an analysis and comparison of alternative courses of action, recommendations about PA force structure and how to employ available PA assets.<sup>7</sup>

PAG is derived from the estimate and establishes the command's PA policies, identifies issues likely to be of interest, delineates the Army perspective, recommends

appropriate themes and addresses the methods, timing and authority for releasing information to the media.<sup>8</sup> PAG is information detailing the unit PA policy toward a specific operation. PAG should include news statements, general answers to anticipated media questions and community relations guidance.<sup>9</sup> PAG is also a good place to insert approved command messages that put the operation into terms the general public can understand. Additionally, good command messages reinforce the appropriate theme of the operation.

These two critical pieces of information will allow the battalion PAO to develop the PA annex to the battalion OPORD. The battalion media plan should be correctly wargamed, rehearsed and disseminated to the lowest level in the unit. The battalion PAO's focus should emphasize media facilitation and preparing the unit for media encounters.

*Media facilitation* is an extremely important but often overlooked responsibility. Failure to properly handle the media will cause a battalion to lose control of the media in its area of operation. Media representatives, especially print reporters, like to get close to the troops and the action, which means they will come to the battalion area. No battalion commander is comfortable with the idea that international media representatives—armed with digital cameras and satellite communications—are wandering loose in his battalion area. Media facilitation covers many things, but the two most important are ground rules and security review.

A reporter maintaining contact with military forces for

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themes. The PA/PSYOP lash-up has been used in Bosnia with great success. Current IO doctrine stipulates that "a separation between PA and PSYOP functions must be preserved to maintain credibility of PA spokespersons and products."<sup>26</sup> However, lessons learned in Bosnia demonstrate the necessity for PA and PSYOP to work together to "identify po-

tential opportunities, map strategy and deconflict information products. Although guided by different policies and processes, they shared several command tasks in countering propaganda and disinformation. Even though they worked closely on many matters, they still maintained their independence."<sup>27</sup>

During the DAWE, the IO section experimented with different message worksheets. This idea was taken forward to Operation *Desert Thunder*, where the IO staff refined the PA worksheet to an Information Operations Product/Action Worksheet. The worksheet focused on the situation or operation, then looked at the command objective in response to that situation. From that, a quantifiable information objective, similar to a mission statement, emerged. To better shape the messages, the target audience was the next step, ranking audiences from primary to secondary. Overall messages or themes were determined from the situation, objectives and desired outcome. The messages also assisted in determining the best method of delivery. Finally, to track COAs or campaigns, a method of evaluation was

any sustained amount of time will come into contact with classified or sensitive information. This is a real security concern that must be taken seriously. To maintain operations security (OPSEC) and protect reporter obligation to perform professional functions, the military relies on voluntary ground rules. Ground rules are conditions established by a military command to govern the conduct of news gathering and release of specific information during an operation or at a specified time.<sup>10</sup> Developed during the Vietnam War and codified by the Sidle Panel after the Grenada Invasion, ground rules permit the integration of reporters into operational units while protecting OPSEC. The battalion PAO should include the approved ground rules in the PA annex and ensure all leaders are familiar with them.

Ground rules' main purpose is to protect OPSEC. Unfortunately, many media representatives do not understand what information is sensitive and what information is publishable. Certain facts can be extremely sensitive, depending on the given situation. Nobody, military or media alike, wants to see American soldiers die because of an honest mistake. Security review is the process of reviewing news media products at some point, usually before transmission, to ensure no oral, written or visual information is filed for publication or broadcast that would divulge national security information, jeopardize ongoing or future operations or threaten the force's safety.<sup>11</sup> During the next "live from the battlefield" broadcast, security review will be done on the spot, possibly during the actual broadcast. The battalion PAO must

ensure that all media escorts are fully trained, understand the ground rules and are familiar with the commander's specific security concerns. To ensure OPSEC, the PAO must fully understand the commander's intent and be aggressive in administering the unit's media facilitation plan. Once that plan is in place, the PAO can focus on the unit's needs by preparing it for media encounters.

The very idea of a media encounter makes military leaders uncomfortable. The act of looking into a camera and answering uncensored questions is likely to cause a soldier to make themselves and their units look bad. Fortunately, this rarely happens. The best way to tell the "Army Story" is to put junior soldiers, officer and enlisted alike, into media interviews. According to then Major General Paul E. Funk, 3d Armored Division commander during the Gulf War, "My feeling is that the real story is about our soldiers. Invariably, if you allow the media to look at what you are doing and put them with soldiers, it comes out fine."<sup>12</sup> The secret to success is preparation through training and the use of proper interview guidelines. The goal of PA training is to prepare soldiers to interact with and operate under the scrutiny of the press.<sup>13</sup> The easiest way to train soldiers for media encounters is to incorporate PA into normal training events, as we now do with Nuclear, Biological and Chemical training and map reading. A few well-trained soldiers in civilian clothes with a camera add a substantial sense of realism to a field training exercise. Prior to deployment, the PAO should develop and distribute a "Media Encounter Card." This pocket-size card should

added. The worksheet, although not perfect, assisted the new IO staff in focusing preemptive or reactive counterpropaganda campaigns in an efficient and fairly comprehensive manner.

To counter adversary propaganda campaigns, the PA, armed with a coordinated IO worksheet, used GIE assets to carry out the external and public information operations. Normally, due to political sensitivities and international implications, propaganda analysis and counterpropaganda plans will be charted and formulated at all levels—tactical through strategic—and many information methods will be used at the appropriate levels, time and place. Because tactical actions can have strategic implications, counterpropaganda campaigns must be coordinated and disseminated at all levels. “This information and news coverage affect national and world opinion, shape the actions of our decision makers and have caused a merging of the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war. Advances in technology, information-age media reporting and the compression of time-space relationships contribute

to the growing interrelationship between the levels of war.”<sup>28</sup>

Another area coordinated by the PAO is *internal* information. Military forces are susceptible to enemy propaganda attempts, especially when the opponent has the ability to garner local and global media attention. The PAO organizes his augmentation assets to disseminate truthful, accurate assessments to counter rumors and enemy disinformation. A well-coordinated and executed adversary propaganda campaign can have disastrous effects on individuals or units at any level and at any time during the phases of a military operation. “Bad news, misinterpretation, inaccurate information and misinformation (or disinformation) impact families and communities as well as soldiers, affecting their morale and commitment to the objective at hand and potentially undermining the critically important human psychological dimensions discussed in FM 100-5.”<sup>29</sup> A timely counterpropaganda program is a commander responsibility. “Closely coordinated and synchronized PA activities have become vital

have such things as command messages, media guidelines, security reminders and points of contact. PA training and a well-made Media Encounter Card, are tools to prevent soldiers from making serious mistakes.

The final requirement for media encounters is the use of media guidelines. US Army Field Manual 46-1, *Public Affairs Operations*, and Joint Publication 3-61, *Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations*, have appendices that cover approved guidelines for discussions with the media. Suggested media guidelines are:

- Keep your answers short and to the point (15 to 20 words).
- Include a command message with each answer.
- Do not speculate.
- Stay in your lane. Only talk about what you know.
- Only answer questions. Do not answer statements.
- Never use “no comment” or “I am not at liberty to say.” These statements make you look disingenuous. If you cannot answer, tell them why. If you do not know, tell them, “I do not know.”

In today’s electronic-driven world, the media will probably arrive at the next battlefield before we do. The news media, and their ever-present cameras, will be on hand to record for posterity our successes and failures. Commanders at all levels must prepare for such encounters. The battalion, with no dedicated PA assets, must work very hard to ensure the success of the PA mission. US Army Chief of Staff General Dennis J. Reimer declares, “Soldiers are our credentials!” In the PA arena this has proved true. Dealing with the media and adhering to the Department of Defense PA policy of

“maximum disclosure with minimum delay” can be successfully achieved if the battalion commander develops an effective PA plan. If the commander selects the right person to function as the battalion PAO and insists on deliberate PA planning, half the battle is won. The success or failure of the battalion’s PA plan relies on the battalion PAO’s ability to perform PA planning, conduct media facilitation and prepare the unit for media encounters.

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11. *Ibid.*
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in this environment. Accurate and timely PA—where commanders are viewed as doing everything in their power to present the truth—are critical to IO's conduct and will help deter aggression, reassure and support our allies and compel those who fight us to accede to our will."<sup>30</sup> The PAO will distribute updated PAG and talking points, but the commanders at each level must continue the information flow down to the lowest level to maintain a consistent information program. The combination of an effective commander's information program and an accompanying internal information campaign "enhances the morale of soldiers, reinforces the stated mission and supports accurate media reports for both soldiers and their families."<sup>31</sup>

To help provide a positive and accurate account of operations to the media, the PA IO staff planner can direct the media to the types of stories we want to portray to our target audiences. Tremendous sources of "good news" stories are soldiers who deal directly with the residents of a deployed theater of operations. CA and PSYOP consistently have contact with host nation representatives and are often tasked to assist noncombatants and refugees in an affected area. CA, and at times PSYOP forces, also have contact with nongovernment organizations and private volunteer organizations. An active program to "steer" news media representatives to those types of stories can have a very positive effect in US and coalition appearance in the GIE and can counter some enemy propaganda attempts.

As Operation *Desert Storm* proved, the timeliness of international media coverage in reporting mili-

tary operations provides another conduit of intelligence. President George Bush stated, "I learn more from CNN than I do from the CIA."<sup>32</sup> Although the quip was likely meant to be humorous, it does show the power, impact and situational understanding the media can provide. With reporters embedded in units, and with an ever-increasing ability to move around the modern battlefield, the intelligence value of media analysis cannot be overlooked. "Non-military sources can provide tactical-level information in near real time to global audiences with the potential of profoundly influencing operations."<sup>33</sup>

## The Future is Now

The Army has been in a period of transition from a Cold War, threat-based force to a capabilities-based one which must be able to function and win throughout the full spectrum of conflict. Due to information-age advances, future battlefields will be far more complex than those of the recent past. Around the world, new threats are emerging and adversaries are taking advantage of new technologies and vast communication capabilities. As the US military focuses on emerging threats, it has also noticed the serious impact of IO on operations. As world events unfold daily to a global audience through a technologically superior media, smart commanders and leaders of nations are taking into account the perception and image they present on the world stage. PA, in union with other IO players, will play a large part in the success and support of military actions as they arise across the spectrum from terrorism threats and disaster relief to full-scale conflict. **MR**

## NOTES

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29. FM 100-6, 1-8.
30. Grange and Kelley, 10.
31. FM 100-6, 6-4.
32. Stech, 38.
33. Starry and Arneson, 3.

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